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# The Human Emotions in Othello

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## ABSTRACT

*“Othello”, an African General in the Venetian Army, was unequivocally abiding paradigm of perennial struggle and how his endurance ameliorated in overcoming this flounder, emerging fervently stronger than ever. He had delineated some of the greatest vendettas and triumphs of his life which swayed Desdemona. Desdemona was the daughter of the Senator of Venice- Brabantio. She fell in love with “Othello” for the ‘dangers’ he took, and he loved her for the ‘strong emotions’ she had for him. They had eloped because they knew that Brabantio would not approve of their love. Brabantio was oblivious of their elope until Iago had snitched on them, which was all a part of his devious masterplan. Iago was “Othello’s” ensign and had plotted against Othello because he was passed over for the post of lieutenant. He was executing his entire evil masterplan with Roderigo- a begrudging suitor of Desdemona, going to the extent of spending all his riches to win her over. Roderigo claims his ardour and love for Desdemona but through the course of the play, it can be fathomed that it was mere concupiscence. Iago’s main target was to obliterate Michael Cassio- the appointed lieutenant and a handsome and charming man as described in the play. He is mainly the pawn in Iago’s plan. His behaviour inadvertently moves the plot forward. Iago’s masterplan portrays how manipulation of human emotion can cause irrevocable atrocities. Feelings of jealousy, hatred, lust, vengeance and cynicism cause nothing but inevitable pain and loss.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### (A) About the Author

William Shakespeare (April 1564 - April 1616) is known as “National poet of England and is one of the greatest dramatists of all time. He was an English poet, playwright and actor of the Renaissance era.”<sup>2</sup>. He has written some of the most iconic plays that illustrate various issues concerning the society, human emotions- majorly love, hate and jealousy, and tragedy. His works reflect what and how lifestyle was during the Renaissance era. One of the most eye-catching and distinguishing attributes of Shakespeare’s work is how certain issues addressed in his works reflect the society and situations currently. Some of his greatest works are- Romeo

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<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, BIOGRAPHY.COM (2020), <https://www.biography.com/writer/william-shakespeare>

and Juliet (1597), Hamlet (1609), Othello (1604), King Lear (1606), Macbeth (1606) and many more.

### **(B) About the Book**

“Othello” by William Shakespeare is a tragic story with its theme surrounding jealousy, abhorrence, reprisal and what may be called a ‘Judas Kiss’. A Venetian army general, Othello gets manipulated to believe that his beloved wife is cheating on him with another man (adultery). He is driven by so much jealousy that he goes to the extent of killing his innocent wife. His emotions shadow his rational judgement and he blindly trusts the man plotting against him- Iago. Iago plays a major role in the way the characters are reacting to situations he is putting them in to execute his plan. Iago’s plan was executed with the help of Roderigo, who is made to believe that Iago is going to help him eliminate Othello from Desdemona’s life so that he can win her over. However, Iago only uses Roderigo for his benefit and ultimately kills him. Roderigo is so blinded by ‘love’ for Desdemona he agrees to everything Iago asks him to do and loses all his riches and wealth. In the end, Iago’s plan was successful, but he was no more a free man to enjoy the outcome, for he was an evil man who caused nothing but pain to all.

***“I would not put a thief in my mouth to steal my brains”<sup>3</sup>***

### **(C) Human Emotions: The doom of “Othello”**

Othello is a fatal tale of love, hate, jealousy and betrayal which evinces what human emotions driving one’s behaviour can do. Its first impression can be identified in Act 1, Scene 1, the conversation between Iago and Roderigo, Othello’s ensign and a ‘lover/admirer’ of Desdemona, respectively. “Roderigo: Thou told’st me thou didst hold him in thy hate. Iago: Despise me, if I do not. Three great ones of the city in personal suit to make me his lieutenant..... God bless the mark! – his Moorship’s ancient”<sup>4</sup>. Roderigo’s hate for the Moor because the lady of his dreams was married to the Moor and Iago’s hate towards the Moor because he was passed over for the post of lieutenant has led to them plotting against Othello. Regardless of whether Iago wished to truly help Rodrigo or not, their mutual hate towards Othello made them so cynical.

Through the course of the drama, Iago has been a manipulative, cynical and vengeance-driven resourceful villain. He was so envious of Michael Cassio as he was named for the post of lieutenant instead of Iago, he drove Cassio into believing in his friendship. Little did Cassio

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<sup>3</sup> WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, OTHELLO (2020) *reprint*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

know Iago was nothing but a devious, cunning and self-centred man. Othello, a gentleman with impeccable rationale was caught in the death trap laid by Iago. Iago simply had to put down some bizarre so-called suspicion about there being a sexual relationship between Desdemona and Cassio for Othello to believe him so blindly. Othello's clouded judgement and blind faith in Iago made him the murderer of his wife.

The drama illustrates certain social issues in a way that is so subtle and at the same time so vivid, maybe continue persistently in society. When Desdemona's father found out that his beautiful daughter was in love with an African man, he was outraged. He believed that Othello being a black man knew black magic and has tricked his innocent daughter into marrying him. This is Racial Prejudice and colour/culture-driven stereotypes. Another major issue is the portrayal of female characters. The female characters have been so blatantly objectified and been called "whore". A husband calling his wife something so demeaning is outrageous. However, it is the sad reality of society. Something that shall be brought to light is the justification of adultery given by Emilia (Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant). "Emilia: But I do think it is their husband's fault..... The ills we do, their ills instruct us so." After coming across this excerpt, readers may feel it is justified to indulge in adultery. One shall be cautious as such justification may seem valid but is a matter of one's morals and value system.

#### **(D) Methodology**

The researcher engages in Qualitative Analysis of the text in order to envisage a comprehensive abstraction of the text, facilitating the process of exploring the human emotions revolving around the story. Such analysis aims in bringing out the true psychological processes of humans that have been glorified in the story which gave rise to the inevitable doom of the characters of this tragedy. This analysis shall yield the contrasting relationship between the inevitable doom of the harmony in the wake of human emotions and sentiments.

#### **(E) Literature Review**

##### **1. The Burdens of Mind Reading in Shakespeare's "Othello": A Cognitive and Psychoanalytic Approach to Iago's Theory of Mind<sup>5</sup>**

This journal article envisages the power of Iago's psychological state of being. The author while appreciating his power of reading people's minds and concomitantly criticises him for using this talent for inimical purposes. Striking the correlation between psychoanalytical approach of mindblindness and the cognitive aspects of his ability to mind-read. It explicitly

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Cefalu, *The Burdens of Mind Reading in Shakespeare's "Othello": A Cognitive and Psychoanalytic Approach to Iago's Theory of Mind*, SHAKESPEARE QUARTERLY 265–294 (2013).

expounds that the reason for Iago's unrest mind is his deep rooted, gloom-ridden, antipathetic envy and extraneous need for virulence towards the General. Psychologically relating the actions of Iago justifies his character but also brings out the need for emendation of deportment.

## **2. Othello's Color In Shakespeare's Tragedy<sup>6</sup>**

Accentuating the sad reality of *Racism*, this article works through the emergence of portrayal of racism in English literature. The tragedy "Othello" being one among the many literary pieces of William Shakespeare, limns the hatred towards the dark-skinned individuals. One of the most intriguing lines of this journal article is ".....that "Othello's race" is "not important" in regard to "the essentials of his character," and that Shakespeare "would have laughed" if anyone "had congratulated him on the accuracy of his racial psychology....." This is absolutely indisputable but William Shakespeare's vision on the depiction of hardships of a black man in that era is a form of reflection of our history and its influence on the present. Masking racism as hatred in the theme of the story is a form of impeccable sagacity and thus, the journal article discerns the essential hidden attributes of the protagonist of the tragedy.

## **3. Desdemona and the Role of Women in the Antebellum North<sup>7</sup>**

Although Desdemona did not have much appearance in the play, she did have ascendancy over the asseveration of emotions of the characters in the play. The author of the journal article articulates this so quintessentially with analysis of Desdemona's character and the predicament of women of that era. Othello being a black man had been subjected to racism and in spite of all this Desdemona fell in love with him. Roderigo had strong feelings for Desdemona and when he hears of the news that she was in love with Othello feeling of jealousy and hatred crept into him. This emotion fuelled Iago's plan of ravaging Othello. Othello was raged on hearing a rumour about his wife's so-called affair. This rage was goaded by feelings of envy and vengeance. All this is inter-linked with the character of Desdemona and thus, evinces the pivotal role of Desdemona's role in the play.

## **4. Passionate Writing The Rhythms of Jealousy in Early Modern English Texts and Drama<sup>8</sup>**

Attempting to explore the dynamics of dramatic writing, the author of this book uses the tragedy of Othello as an example to show how writers tend to use jealousy as a modus operandi in dramatizing a piece of writing. Maybe Shakespeare intended on using this emotion the same

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<sup>6</sup> Zhou Xiaojing, *Othello's Colour in Shakespeare's Tragedy*, CLA JOURNAL 335–348 (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Edward Kahn, *Desdemona and the Role of Women in the Antebellum North*, THEATRE JOURNAL 235–255 (2008).

<sup>8</sup> EMANUEL STELZER, *PASSIONATE WRITING THE RHYTHMS OF JEALOUSY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH TEXTS AND DRAMA*.

way in this play, but he also ended up using it to express the manky emotion this is. Othello's impressionability and Iago's nefarious mind were the premise of jealousy and the end of everything.

### **5. Shakespearean Tragedy, Ethics, and Social Justice**

This particular chapter of the book focuses on all the emotions revolving around the tragedy of *Othello*. It pinpoints the essence of racism in the play; all the white characters persistently dwell on the protagonist's blackness as animal pollution. Something that raises some very intriguing thoughts of the reader is this line from the book- ". Hating Othello is but the means of justifying his own right to Desdemona's racialized "beauty, wit and fortunes"" While sympathizing with Othello about the loss and pain he goes through in the end of the play, the above-mentioned line shall help in balancing the emotions of the reader/spectators of the play.

### **6. Vengeance, Complicity and Criminal Law in Othello<sup>9</sup>**

This particular article is very eye-catching and unique as it attempts to correlate criminal law and the acts of the characters. The most relevant matter is the fact that the author of the article relates Iago's mastermind with criminal cleverness. It accentuates the features of the textbook definition of a criminal mastermind and execution of the perfect crime. This postulates how emotions and crimes are intertwined. Crime has intention and intention grows out of hatred, jealousy and vengeance.

## **II. ANALYSIS**

"Othello" is one of the greatest tragedies written by Shakespeare that has incorporated the element of emotions which continues to reflect how feelings of hatred, envy and vengeance lead to the doom of a person. The extent to which one allows another to exploit vehemence, the closer one gets to his bedevil end. As the play opens, Shakespeare does not seem hold back on the hatred in the hearts of the two men plotting Othello's doom. This shall be considered tout de suite as it indicates the motif of the play. Hatred being a such a strong emotion ruins rationality and righteousness. The Protagonist himself ends up in the trap of hatred. When learning from a rumour that his wife is possibly straying, he is infuriated and suddenly, hates the woman he claimed to be the love of his life. Roderigo's strong feelings for Desdemona made him oblivious of the everything. He plotted against Othello with the sole intention of winning Desdemona back.

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<sup>9</sup> Richard H. McAdams, VENGEANCE, COMPLICITY AND CRIMINAL LAW IN OTHELLO SSRN (2011), [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1893096](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1893096)

Jealousy is a malevolent emotion and has shown its corollary in the form of destruction. Roderigo was jealous of Othello because Desdemona loved Othello. This jealousy fuelled Iago's evil masterplan. As a part of this evil masterplan, Othello is lured into believing that Desdemona was falling for another man and his inferiority complex led him to be jealous. Distrusting his own wife made him lose her forever, turned him into the murderer of his wife. Despicable pain emanating out of hatred and jealousy is inevitable and inopportune. These emotions in the play are an ambush of a vicious cycle trapping all those who are competent.

**“Never play with the feelings of others. Because you may win the game but the risk is that you will surely lose the person for a life time.”**

**~ William Shakespeare.**

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